



# Focus

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## Washington Ranking Method

Every hazardous waste site in Washington is unique and poses a potentially different type and level of risk to human health and the environment. The Model Toxics Control Act requires these sites to be ranked relative to each other to guide Ecology's use of cleanup resources. Working with the Science Advisory Board, Ecology has developed a ranking system for hazardous sites known as the Washington Ranking Method.

Ecology ranks a site after the agency gathers enough information to complete a site hazard assessment. Owners/operators and any other potentially liable persons known to the agency are notified when their site is ranked and placed on Ecology's Hazardous Sites List. Additions to the list are announced twice each year.

### What Does the Washington Ranking Method Do?

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A site's potential threat to human health and the environment is estimated using the data gathered during the site hazard assessment. The Washington Ranking Method categories sites on the basis of this information. Sites are ranked on a scale of one to five, with a score of one representing the highest relative level of concern and five the lowest.

The Washington Ranking Method is designed to:

- Provide a consistent, objective means of assessing sites
- Establish a scientifically defensible method of evaluating sites
- Maximize accuracy with minimum data
- Provide adequate distinction between sites

### How Will the Rankings Be Used?

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*It is important to keep in mind that hazardous site ranking is not the same as risk assessment.* Rather, it is an estimation of the potential threat posed by a site relative to all other ranked sites in the state. An actual assessment of a site's health risk is determined after analysis by the state Department of Health or by a county health department.

The Washington Ranking Method provides a framework in which to organize and compare sites. However, it is not the only factor used to determine which sites receive priority for Ecology's resources. Other considerations include the availability of funds, the potential cost of cleanup, the level of cooperation shown by a responsible party, and public concern about a site.

The Model Toxics Control Act was implemented in March, 1989, after voter approval of Initiative 97. Some of the sites being investigated and cleaned up under the Act were already receiving attention under previous laws. In the interest of efficiency, work will continue on most of these sites even if they rank lower than newly added sites.

### How Does the Washington Ranking Method Work?

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When ranking a site, Ecology considers the primary routes through which humans or the environment could be exposed to hazardous substances found on that site. These routes

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include air, surface water and ground water. For each “exposure route,” the following information is evaluated to determine the relative risk posed by each site.

Substance Characteristics	Site Characteristics	Exposure Potential
Toxicity of substance	Migration potential	Population
Quantity of substance	Soil permeability	Sensitive environment
Mobility of substance	Average rainfall	Surface water uses
Containment	Flood plain	(irrigation, drinking water, fisheries)
	Terrain slope	
	Distance to ground water	Ground water uses

## **What is the Relationship Between the State Ranking Method and the Federal Hazard Ranking System?**

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The federal Hazard Ranking System’s purpose is to nominate hazardous waste sites with high federal scores to the National Priorities List. The federal system is used to set cleanup priorities for the Environmental Protection Agency. The Washington Ranking Method is not intended to duplicate the federal Hazard Ranking System model. The purpose of the Washington Ranking Method is to help Ecology set priorities for sites not on the federal list.

## **How Can I Get More Information?**

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For additional information on the Washington Ranking Method, contact:

*Michael J. Spencer*      Department of Ecology      (360) 407-7195  
Toxics Cleanup Program  
P.O. Box 47600  
Olympia, WA 98504-7600

If you are interested in finding out more about a specific site or want to learn which sites in your area have been ranked, call the Ecology regional office in the area in which the site is located:

- **Northwest Regional Office**      425/649-7000  
(Island, King, Kitsap, San Juan, Skagit,  
Snohomish, Whatcom counties)
- **Southwest Regional Office**      360/407-6300  
(Clallam, Clark, Cowlitz, Grays Harbor,  
Jefferson, Lewis, Mason, Pacific, Pierce,  
Skamania, Thurston, Wahkiakum counties)
- **Central Regional Office**      509/575-2490  
(Benton, Chelan, Douglas, Kittitas, Klickitat,  
Okanogan, Yakima counties)
- **Eastern Regional Office**      509/456-2926  
(Adams, Asotin, Columbia, Ferry, Franklin,  
Garfield, Grant, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Spokane,  
Stevens, Walla Walla, Whitman counties)

The Site Register is an Ecology publication containing status and ranking information about sites. You can request to be placed on the Site Register mailing list by contacting Sherrie Minnick, (360) 407-7200 or 1 (800) 826-7716.